

The Mission

What was The State Department thinking by dispatching a mission of boxers and golfers to a nondescript Baltic republic which had torn away from another even moreso?

The natives inept in both sports, thus the sting of total loss gets tempered by many references to warriors' hearts at the final banquet, with toasts of a rocket fuel made from well-rotted potatoes. Gargantuan drinking accompanies the national dish, a gray casserole.

What made it easier for both golfers and boxers: the revered name for warrior is pronounced "New"-so "News" sprinkled into every post-competition interview. And now garners uproarious sobs at the banquet.

When the queasy teams depart the shabby airport, they're presented with a box of the nation's products, mostly toilet novelties that play tunes or squirt fragrance as the paper unrolls. These prove a hit with the boxers' mothers, less so with the golfers'.